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ABSTRACT

The University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children evaluated the progress of the Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) Initiative in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. MOST's goals are to improve the supply, accessibility, affordability and quality of school-age care, especially for low-income children; and to strengthen the overall coherence of school-age care as a system. School-age care is defined as organized activities for children ages 5-14, especially for families in low-income communities, that occur during non-school hours, including before- and after-school programs, child care centers, summer programs, sports leagues, tutoring and mentoring programs, and cultural and arts programs. The goals of the evaluation included identifying the attributes/characteristics and supply of school age child care in each city, and assessing the effectiveness of the MOST strategies in each city. The interim findings of the Chapin Hall evaluation show that communities must develop a system that includes: (1) providers that offer direct services to children and families, intermediary organizations, and city and state agencies; (2) long term quality improvement of school-age care programs which includes technical assistance from outside the program, staff support, and parent involvement; (3) the role of private and public sector funding; and (4) the importance of diverse partnerships that bring together schools, community organizations, and the private sector. (JPB)

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Making the Most of Out-of-School Time

Executive Summary: Interim Findings From an Evaluation Conducted by Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

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About Making the Most of Out-of-School Time :

An initiative of the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund

Since 1998, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has invested $9.7 million in Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST), an initiative to improve the quality and quantity of before- and after-school programs for 6- to 14-year-olds in low-income communities, specifically in Boston, Chicago and Seattle. The initiative is designed to develop models of school-age child care systems in these communities, increase opportunities for professional development for providers of out-of-school care and increase public awareness of school-age care needs.

The Fund made an initial grant in 1993 to the National Institute on Out-of-School Time at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women to manage the initiative and provide technical assistance to participating sites. In 1995, foundations in each of the MOST cities received implementation grants of $1.2 million each. These grants were followed a year later by $200,000 grants to improve child care facilities. In October 1998, the Fund's board awarded an additional $2.3 million in grants to extend and strengthen the work in the MOST cities and to disseminate early lessons.

While acting as fiscal agents for the initiative, the community foundations each designated a local agency to lead the work of developing a system of school-age care in their communities.

Grant recipients and lead agencies in each city are:

- The Boston Community Foundation/Parents United for Child Care
- The Chicago Community Trust/Day Care Action Council
- Seattle Foundation/City of Seattle Department of Housing and Human Services, The School's Out Consortium of the YWCA and Child Care Resources, Inc.

A separate grant was made to the National School-Age Child Care Alliance to develop national standards for high-quality care and create an assessment tool to help improve school-age care programs.

Foreword

How can communities productively engage young people in meaningful activities the hours they are not in school? Answers to that question are beginning to emerge from a $9.7 million initiative, *Making the Most of Out-of-School Time* (MOST), which the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund has been supporting since 1993 in Boston, Chicago and Seattle. As shown in this report of interim findings from an evaluation of the initiative, the three cities, assisted by Wellesley's National Institute on Out-of-School Time, have been making progress in their efforts to improve the quantity and quality of before- and after-school programs for 5- to 14-year-olds, especially for families in low-income communities where there is often a dearth of such programs.

These initial and promising findings come at an important time. Various issues—ranging from changes in welfare laws, to education reform, to a recognition that unsupervised out-of-school time puts many youngsters at risk of becoming involved in dangerous activities such as drugs, violence and sex—have brought long overdue national attention to the need to make high-quality, affordable programs available to more American families.

At the same time, demand for out-of-school time programs already exceeds the available supply and is expected to grow even more over the next few years. The Government Accounting Office predicts that, by the year 2002, the current supply of available programs will meet only one-quarter of the need in many urban areas. Already about five million children from a variety of income groups spend some time every week without adult supervision. Barriers such as cost, transportation difficulties and safety issues often put programs that do exist out of reach for many families.

This new awareness of the problem, combined with a desire to fix it, makes the lessons being learned in the MOST communities valuable to policymakers and others involved in efforts to craft solutions.

So what have we learned so far? Several early lessons are emerging from the evaluation and the Fund's work with the three MOST communities:

- To successfully address the related needs of program quality and availability, communities must focus on the development of a system that comprises three elements:
  - *providers* that offer direct services to children and their families;
  - *intermediary organizations* (such as child care resource and referral agencies, child care advocacy groups, colleges and universities) that provide information to parents looking for appropriate programs, training and technical assistance to improve the quality of programs offered, and professional development opportunities for the staff who work with children; and
  - *city and state agencies* that provide funding, licensing and regulatory oversight.
- Improving the quality of school-age care programs is a long-term process. It requires sufficient resources, to be sure, but also technical assistance

from outside the program, adequate and stable staff support, and parental involvement.

- Public sector funding is a major source of support for school-age care, and is especially critical for families in low-income communities who may otherwise be unable to afford it. Private funding can also play a part, either as a lever to encourage public agencies to put more dollars into school-age care or to support improvement in program quality.
- Diverse partnerships that bring together schools, community-based organizations, cultural institutions, park districts and the private sector help communities see possibilities that otherwise might be overlooked and encourage new thinking about ways to share physical resources, increase opportunities to develop the skills of child care professionals and open new avenues for additional funding.

As this report makes clear, MOST is helping clarify the attributes of a strong school-age care system. We hope that by sharing the experiences of the cities taking part in the initiative, we can contribute to the national discussion about how to advance efforts to develop quality, affordable and accessible programs and services that address the needs of children during the hours they spend outside of school.

A final note: Chapin Hall Center for Children will complete its evaluation and produce a final report on the MOST initiative in 1999, which the Fund expects to make public later that year.

M. Christine DeVita, President
DeWitt Wallace-Readers Digest Fund
December 1998

Executive Summary

The MOST Initiative: An Interim Evaluation Report

In this report, Chapin Hall Center for Children presents selected interim findings from its evaluation of the Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST) Initiative, which the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (DWRD) launched in 1994. MOST's goals are (1) to improve the supply, accessibility, affordability and quality of school-age care, especially for low-income children and (2) to strengthen the overall coherence of school-age care as a system, in three cities: Boston, Chicago and Seattle—each of which received a three-year, $1.2 million grant in 1995. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women, which has played an instrumental role in designing the MOST Initiative, provides ongoing technical assistance to the three cities.

School-age care is defined as organized activities for children ages 5 to 14 that occur during the non-school hours. Its central component is after-school programs, both those licensed to provide child care and the many others that are either exempt from licensing, or unlicensed, whether drop-in or closed enrollment programs. It also includes before-school programs, summer programs, sports leagues, tutoring and mentoring programs, and cultural and arts programs, classes and activities. School-age programs are provided by early childhood and child care agencies, child and family services, settlements, youth-serving agencies and organizations, cultural and arts organizations, parks and recreation departments, schools, libraries, churches, ethnic mutual assistance associations, and increasingly by private, proprietary child care chains.

School-age care comprises organized activities for children ages 5 to 14 that occur during non-school hours. It includes before-school programs, summer programs, sports leagues, tutoring and mentoring programs, among others.

Part I

Background: Out of School Time as Problem and Program

It doesn't take a Ph.D. to figure out that young people need some place positive to go after school to stay off the streets and out of their empty houses... With 17 million American parents scrambling to find care for their school-age children during work hours, the problem keeps growing.

— *Newsweek*, April 27, 1998

The timing of the MOST Initiative is fortuitous. Interest in children's—especially poor children's—out-of-school time has been building throughout the 1990s and seems to have crystallized recently in a variety of federal legislative proposals for new or expanded school-age child care programs, in a number of foundation initiatives,[1] and in media attention to this issue. The author of the *Newsweek* article cited above writes that among police, social service providers and policy makers, there's a new awareness that structured activity during out-of-school hours is absolutely critical to confronting many of the country's most vexing social problems.[2] President Clinton is promoting school-age care, as are senators, congressional representatives, police chiefs and public prosecutors. The President has proposed hundreds of millions of dollars for school-age care in his recent child care proposals; Senator Boxer of California has sponsored a bill called the After-School Education and Safety Act, to create new after school programs; the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act proposal (H.R. 1818) includes funds for after school programs, as does the Reading Excellence Act (H.R. 2614), sponsored by Representative Goodling of Pennsylvania. Among the raft of proposed child care bills before Congress, a number have provisions supportive or permissive of expanded funding for school-age care and expanded support for school-age care providers. In the private sector, both the Mott Foundation and the philanthropist George Soros have announced major initiatives to expand after-school programs U.S. cities.

Although interest in school-age care seems new, it is far from a new phenomenon. There is a long history in the United States of public worry about, and efforts to supervise, the out-of-school time of poor children and youth, especially in urban areas. A century ago settlements were already organizing clubs and classes for the children of immigrants, worrying about the risks and bad influences of the streets and focusing on the need to help young people become good citizens. It is probably safe to say that today's school-age care programs are not all that different from the earliest programs sponsored by settlements, Boys and Girls Clubs and YM/YWCAs.

What does appear unprecedented is the family and community context in which children are growing up and in which school-age care programs operate. A

[1] Modest funds from Title I (compensatory education), literacy programs, delinquency prevention/juvenile justice, community development block grants, federal nutrition programs and of course federal and state child care subsidies and programs, already support school-age care, as do funds from federally sponsored mentoring and tutoring programs.

[2] Jonathan Alter and colleagues, "It's 4 p.m. Do you know where your children are?" *Newsweek*, April 27, 1998, pp. 29-33.

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growing proportion of poor urban children reside in families in which parents' best intentions to focus on their children's developmental needs are overwhelmed by their own personal difficulties and life situation. In the past, the streets truly were urban children's after-school programs. The informal play and street life of poor and working-class children could be said to be both developmentally rich and helpful to those children's struggles to find their way into American society. Though the streets held some dangers, those dangers were rarely mortal and only occasionally pulled children off track. These historic truths no longer hold. In the past, urban schools had the resources to cope with the additional demands posed by modest numbers of children with learning and other vulnerabilities. Now they have fewer resources and larger numbers of children with such vulnerabilities.

In light of the changing contexts of poor urban children's lives, school-age care programs increasingly are looked to as a vehicle for preventing or ameliorating a number of problems and risk factors closely related to poverty and/or residence in a low-income neighborhood. These include academic difficulties, gang affiliation, antisocial behavior, substance abuse, too-early childbearing (and sexual victimization), and more general alienation from mainstream mores and institutions. A very different argument for school-age care programs for poor children—and one not found in current debate on this issue—is that they can promote and enrich normal development. Poor (and working-class) children, just as their more advantaged peers, should be exposed to opportunities, guided by knowledgeable adults, to discover things they are or would like to be good at, to become skillful at those things, to learn about the world outside their neighborhood, and so forth.[3]

School-age care programs increasingly are looked to as a vehicle for preventing or ameliorating a number of problems and risk factors closely related to residence in a low-income neighborhood. These include academic difficulties, gang affiliation, substance abuse and too-early child-bearing.

A second societal development stimulating interest in school-age care is an apparent growth in the percentage of children left alone and/or without adult supervision after school. This phenomenon has

[3] Recently, there has been a reaction in the youth services field (and to a lesser extent among those serving younger school-age children) to the problem- or risk-driven nature of rationales for after school programs. In addition to the argument that poor children should be entitled to the same developmental resources as their more advantaged peers, it is argued that they should be viewed as resources and potential contributors, not problems or threats. Unfortunately, these less instrumental rationales do not compel the public's and politicians' attention in American society.

become a social issue in recent decades because of the growing numbers of lower- and middle-income women forced into or choosing to enter the labor force.[4] In spite of growing public concern, it is not fully clear how many children, of what age, from which groups and economic strata, are left alone after school for some percentage of time. (Moreover, there are conceptual problems in defining alone.) Most reports suggest that somewhere between 5 and 10 percent of school-age children spend some time alone after school on a regular basis; and maybe 20 to 30 percent on a periodic basis. These percentages vary for children of different ages, ethnic or racial backgrounds and family incomes (Brayfield, Deich, & Hofferth, 1993; Hedin and colleagues, 1986; U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1991).

Younger latchkey children, particularly in urban settings (the evidence for suburban children is more equivocal), have been found in some literature to be more anxious, fearful, prone to spend too much time watching television and, in some cases, have lower academic achievement than peers participating in after school programs or with parents at home after school. Older latchkey children have been found to be susceptible to the influence of problematic peers, and thus to experimentation with drugs and sexual activity, and the influence of gangs. Latchkey children have also been found occasionally to have more externalizing type behavioral problems (precursors to conduct disorder).[5]

Together, both poverty-related concerns and those stemming from the growing number of latchkey children, add up to the fact that too many children these days are too much on their own, psychologically as well as physically. Too many children are spending too much energy coping, being responsible for themselves and often their siblings. The implication is that good school-age care programs can be an important protective resource for children, the more so given the decline in protection and attention from other societal institutions. School-age programs are viewed as a supportive and developmental institution of both first and last resort for growing numbers of children. Yet the growing public and policy interest in, and social rationales for, school-age care have to be overlaid on an existing infrastructure that is very heterogeneous

[4] Poor women with school age children have always worked in large numbers, but that reality never seemed to stir the publics imagination in the way that large numbers middle-class children coming home to empty houses and apartments after school has. Welfare reform has focused some new light on the child care needs of poor families, but mostly those with young children.

[5] At the same time, the literature on latchkey children has sometimes been too simplistic in its arguments. It has mostly ignored ethnic and community differences, for instance the role of older siblings in caring for their younger sibling when parents work. Its designs are such that being a latchkey child is confounded with other variables, such as family income, parental characteristics, neighborhood of residence, single parenthood, and so forth. To cite just one example, parents who are more likely to seek out and enroll their children in after-school programs may also be more likely to be protective in others way, to communicate clear values and expectations, to be involved in their children's school careers, and so forth. (The confound of more resourceful families being more likely to find and use community resources raises the interesting question of whether there ought to be more of a family support dimension to out-of-school programs, i.e. an effort to reach out and provide supportive services to less resourceful, and possibly more stressed and isolated families.) When comparing latchkey children to children in out-of-school programs, studies have often failed to differentiate between decent quality and poor quality program experiences (with exceptions; see Vandell, Shumow & Posner, 1996, who argue that poor quality after-school programs actually act as an additional risk factor).

and, in some respects, very fragile.

There is no reliable public funding stream for school-age care, aside from child care subsidies. Those programs that serve poor and working-class children typically are inadequately funded and sometimes insecurely funded as well. Many staff have little or no formal preparation for work with children, their salaries are very low and a large number view their work in this field as short-term. Programs sometimes must rely on borrowed space. The modest evidence that exists suggests that the quality of many school-age programs for poor children is mixed at best.

The heterogeneous nature of school-age care provision (see footnote 1), combined with the marginal conditions under which too many programs operate, raise a number of questions: What should the priorities and purposes of school-age care be and who should define those priorities and purposes? Should they be primarily about protection and care (a safe haven for children), supervision and control, enriched developmental experience and opportunity to nurture special interests and abilities, reinforcement of school learning and academics, or opportunities to develop supportive adult relationships outside the family?[6] What are realistic expectations of school-age care programs? Ought they, or can they, be asked to compensate for what families, schools, or other social institutions should but often do not do? What policies and practices support and promote good quality school-age care programs? If this field of service is to grow, how should it be organized? Should we think of school-age care programs as social services or community resources? Should we attach them to and build them on existing systems—schools, child care, youth-serving organizations?

The school-age child care infrastructure is very fragile. There is no reliable public funding stream aside from child care subsidies. In addition, many staff have little or no preparation for their work, their salaries are low and few are committed to it for the long term.

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[6] One could argue that an equally, perhaps more, important purpose of out-of-school programs is to provide places and opportunities for unstructured, spontaneous play. Yet making opportunity to play a key rationale for this field of services presents even bigger obstacles than making equal access to normal developmental resources a rationale.

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The MOST initiative is beginning to address these questions in three ways: first, by testing innovative approaches to strengthening supply and quality, and engaging in system-building in Boston, Chicago and Seattle; second, by stimulating debate about key school-age care issues in each city; and third, by documenting and analyzing the experiences of the three cities through the MOST evaluation.

Part II

The MOST Strategy

MOST began in each city with a year-long planning process that involved a variety of stakeholders in the school-age care field. The resulting plans served as a framework and guide for a three-year implementation phase (June 1995 - June 1998). Each city received $1.4 million during this three-year period and was encouraged to raise approximately $800,000 in matching resources (some of which could be in-kind). Lead organizations in each city were given responsibility for managing a multifaceted implementation strategy, derived from the original plan, and setting priorities each year. Although these strategies differ in many particulars, at their heart is a set of collaborative structures—some kind of governance or oversight group or committee and some number of task-specific working groups or committees—with responsibility to review and refine original plans, identify emergent needs, develop priorities and, in some cases, distribute funds.

Over the course of the initiative, the DWRD grant money and any matching funds have been distributed by the lead agency and committees directly to school-age care programs and to intermediary organizations that support those programs and their providers, and/or provide services (e.g., information and referral) to families. The funds have been used to do the following:

- help start new school-age care programs and expand existing ones;
- provide grants to school-age care programs to purchase materials and curricular resources, improve their facilities, or invest in other ways in program improvement;
- support technical assistance to school-age care programs and training for their staff;
- expand professional education activities, including certification and affordability (for instance, subsidizing tuition expenses) for school-age care providers;
- support curriculum development and dissemination of curricular resources for school-age care programs;
- link community-based programs to external resources and institutions;
- subsidize school-age care slots for low-income children and youth;
- build databases on available services, for use by families and for planning purposes;
- educate the community at large, as well as civic and political leaders, about school-age care issues; and
- help a sample of school-age care programs in each city undergo a self-improvement process (called Assessing School-Age Child Care Quality, or ASQ), developed by the National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the National School-Age Care Alliance.

Part III

The Evaluation Design

In late 1996, DWRD contracted with The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago to conduct an evaluation of MOST. The purposes of the evaluation are to:

- describe the attributes/characteristics of the school-age care system in each city;
- describe the collaborative structures and new inter-institutional relationships created through MOST in each city, and assess their contribution to strengthening the sense of identity and coherence of school-age care as a system;
- analyze the supply of school-age care in each city and document MOST's contribution to it, focusing especially on low-income children and under-served populations (e.g., refugees and immigrants);
- describe and assess the effectiveness of the MOST strategies in each city to strengthen the quality of school-age care programs and how well individual strategies are linked in a common effort; and
- reflect on the overall MOST strategy, including its goals.

These purposes have been translated into a set of research questions that guide data collection. The evaluation team is relying on a variety of methods to secure the data needed to address the research questions: interviews with MOST staff, staff of school-age care programs and intermediary organizations in each city and staff of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time; observation of MOST committees; observations of school-age care programs; collection of existing quantitative data in each of the three cities (particularly pertaining to supply); and collection of reports and other documents from the MOST lead agencies and school-age care programs.

Chapin Hall began its evaluation work in the spring of 1997, well into the second year of the initiative. Data will continue to be collected through the summer of 1998 and will be analyzed during the 1998-99 school year; a final report will be prepared during the summer of 1999.

This interim report consists of three separate mini-studies, each pertaining to a central mission of the MOST Initiative. The first is a report of our efforts to develop and test a methodology for ascertaining the supply of school-age care in each city. The second is a report on NIOST's effort to pilot the ASQ in each of the MOST cities. The third is an effort to address the question of what might be meant by the school-age care system; to describe the characteristics of school-age care systems in each city; and to discuss each city's system-building efforts. A number of important lines of activity within MOST are not discussed in this report, but will be taken up in the final report.

Part IV

Analyzing the Supply of School-Age Care; Determining the Contribution of MOST

In their proposals, each of the three cities committed to contributing a certain number of slots to the supply of school-age care over three years. Boston committed to creating 1,500 slots over three years; Chicago 4,000; and Seattle 2,160. New slots were to be created in a variety of ways: providing MOST funds to existing programs to be used to pay part of the cost of new slots; using MOST funds to start new programs, or satellite sites for existing programs; and providing funds to make existing slots more affordable. Less direct strategies for increasing supply have included calling for legislation to increase funding for school-age care, encouraging greater commitment to school-age care by city agencies and school systems, and working with individual programs to strengthen their resource development capacities. At the end of the first two and a half years, the three cities have made moderate to substantial progress toward their goals.

Boston

In the first year of implementation, Boston MOST set aside $300,000 to subsidize 600 new slots (i.e., $500 per slot) in 27 programs. In the second year, it provided funds to 22 of those programs to continue supporting those slots at a reduced level and provided $62,300 to fund an additional 154 slots in 12 other programs. It also underwrote 300 additional before-school slots in 17 programs. Thus, at the end of two years, Boston MOST had subsidized 754 new after-school and 300 before-school slots. Boston also has a long-term strategy of increasing supply through legislative action and encouraging the public schools to take a more active role in providing school-age care.

Chicago

Chicago MOST provided $2,500 expansion grants, or a total of $100,000 to the Chicago Park District to help pay for an additional 10 children in each of 40 programs. A second effort involved larger grants to support 34 new programs (29 opened in 1995-1996, five more in 1996-1997 and another six followed in 1997-1998). In total, these 40 new sites represent additional slots for approximately 4,500 school-age children in previously underserved communities.

At the end of the first two and a half years, the three MOST cities—Boston, Chicago and Seattle—have made moderate to substantial progress toward their goals of increasing the supply of school-age child care slots.

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Seattle

Seattle MOST has focused its effort on creating slots for underserved populations and/or neighborhoods. Three agencies received large grants of up to $60,000 to open new programs, capable of serving a total of 85 children. Smaller $16,000 grants were given to agencies to support expansion of seven existing programs, creating 165 new slots. In total, these grants supported the creation of 250 slots in out-of-school-time programs. (Of the $600,000 committed to creating new programs/slots, one-third came from MOST and two-thirds from Seattle's Family and Education Levy.) Additionally, MOST funds have supported culturally specific summer programs which served 256 children of immigrant families in the first year and 307 in the second year. MOST has also funded 24 scholarships for children with special developmental needs, to enable them to participate in school-age programs.

Analyzing Supply

When we began our work in the spring of 1997, we were urged to undertake a study of aggregate supply in each city. Given the difficulty of conceptualizing and measuring supply,[7] we decided to design an exploratory study that would test our assumptions, clarify what it would take to develop an adequately complex estimate of supply and perhaps provide a somewhat more complete set of numbers than seemed to exist. We began systematically searching for and seeking to acquire information during the early summer of 1997.

We approached the task of securing data from both the top down and the bottom up, analyzing information in large databases and from specific providers. A first major task in all three cities was to identify existing sources of aggregated or aggregatable data on supply; reconcile them; ascertain the types of information they yielded and make preliminary inferences about the value of the information (largely based on how the information had been collected). The next step in our data collection was to seek bottom-up information, both to check the reliability of information in the data bases and to fill in blanks—in some cases large blanks—left by those databases. In all three cities, the basic strategy involved interviewing providers, especially the large, multi-site providers, including youth-serving organizations, park districts and schools.[8] Once we had data from different sources we would fill in blanks, check as best we could for consistency and try to reconcile differences.

[7] For instance, it is not easy to decide which kinds of programs and activities should be included in a study of supply. Moreover, supply is not a unitary thing. There are many kinds of programs, activities and institutions involved in school-age care, each of which defines and measures the numbers of children served in different ways. This makes it hard to aggregate information into a common metric. Supply can be thought of in terms of theoretical supply, actual capacity and enrollment. Not least, much of the data we would need did not exist, and existing data had not been collected with our concerns in mind.

[8] In Chicago, where we were able to spend more time on the study, we also constructed a brief survey, which was sent to 240 providers (along with a flyer announcing a new activities resource book); distributed the survey to park district programs; did phone interviews with a sample of 24 of 77 libraries; and began phone interviews with a sample of Catholic elementary schools. (Survey instruments are found in Exhibits A6 and A6 in the Appendix of the full report.)

Supply Study Findings

The study of supply in Boston identified 7,967 slots in 187 programs: 6,246 after-school slots, 957 before-school and 764 drop-in slots. Roughly half of all these slots are licensed. The largest providers in Boston include the Boston Community Centers, which serve about 1,000 children, and the Boys and Girls Clubs, which serve about 1,200 children. These, and five other large (i.e. multi-site) providers provide about half of the total school-age care capacity in Boston. An important limitation of the Boston findings is the lack of information about private schools, family day care providers, libraries, schools and other categories of providers.

The study of supply in Chicago identified 11,000 slots for school-age children in 242 licensed and license-exempt programs. There are several new Chicago Park District and Public School programs. Adding these, we estimate that there are programs and activities capable of serving 73,000 children (if not more) after school. This figure is based on information about the following providers: licensed and license-exempt centers and family child care providers (with approximately 13,000 slots for school-age children); 83 Chicago Park District Park Kids programs (with estimates of enrollment ranging from 5,552 to 8,115); Chicago Public Schools (37,000); Chicago Public Libraries (4,500); Catholic schools (8,000); and nontraditional tutoring, mentoring and cultural programs (3,600).

Although our study of supply in Seattle is far from finished, estimates of capacity and/or participation in programs and services for school-age children from a number of different sources suggest that there may be places for as many as 14,000 children during out-of-school time hours. This figure is based on information about the following providers and organizations: 157 after-school programs (6,253); 327 family child care providers (644); Seattle Parks & Recreation Department programs in 23 community centers and 16 public schools serving middle-school children (6,200); and 24 branches of the Seattle Public Library (700, which includes both participation in an after-school program called SPLASH, and estimates of the number of children who use the libraries after school on a regular basis). Some out-of-school time activities and programs missing from this picture are those affiliated with churches and private schools, and 180 programs and services listed in the MOST database in categories other than center-based after-school programs (e.g., tutoring and mentoring programs, sports programs, and arts and cultural programs).

Supply Study Lessons

Our efforts to figure out what it might take to measure the supply of school-age care within a city yielded a number of useful lessons. These include the following:

- Although we arrived at one, there really is no one number can that can summarize the variety of organized programs, activities, resources and supports for children during their out-of-school hours. It is possible to generate some numbers within specific categories, but since the categories are not comparable, the value of converting the numbers to a common metric—say full-time equivalent (FTE) slots—is dubious. It seems more useful simply to describe the variety of efforts: full-time-full-year programs; arts, sports and summer programs; tutoring and mentoring programs; and so forth.
- Each city requires a somewhat specific data-collection strategy, based on how the provision of school-age care is organized and who is involved. And that strategy has to be bottom up (gathered from individual providers directly) as well as top down (gathered from administrative, regulatory and resource and referral agencies).
- Supply numbers derived from different methods tend to refer to different things: the large child care databases yield information on capacity and interviews yield information on children enrolled and/or actually served.
- Interviews with representatives of large providers tend to yield large numbers that have little intrinsic meaning; those numbers have to be explored and unpacked.
- Quantitative data on supply do not, obviously, yield critical information on the quality of that supply, its location and accessibility; and which children or communities are better or less-well served.
- Supply does not remain stable from year to year. Funding for subsidies changes; agencies start new programs, and grow or shrink existing ones.

Part V

The NIAS/ASQ Pilot Experience

ASQ (Assessing School-Age Quality) is a structured self-assessment approach to program improvement, linked to an accreditation system sponsored by the National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA). Conceptually, it breaks program quality down into 21 categories organized under the headings of human relationships, indoor environment, outdoor environment, activities, safety, health and nutrition. The ASQ was developed by staff at the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at Wellesley College, and became an element of MOST in the context of a larger pilot effort that involved programs around the country.

The ASQ was not designed with MOST in mind. Originally, DWRD required each MOST city to develop its own quality standards and program improvement strategies. At the same time, NSACA and NIOST reached an agreement to organize a national pilot of the ASQ. NIOST recommended that six programs in each MOST city participate in the pilot. The cities wanted ten, and that was the number agreed upon. MOST staff in each city chose the participating programs, using criteria unique to that city, but trying to assure some diversity in sponsorship, program size and type.

The MOST pilot offered the Wellesley team an opportunity to assess the effects of modest technical assistance by specially trained ASQ advisors (including building a peer support network among participating programs) and of financial incentives on the success of the process. The ASQ advisors, each of whom was responsible for two programs, were selected by the ASQ coordinator in each city. ASQ advisors participated in a training workshop in November 1995 (which focused both on the ASQ and on building relationships with programs); and representatives from each of the sites (including parents) received training in early 1996. NIOST staff provided ongoing support and guidance to the ASQ advisors during the pilot.

The Pilot Experience

Participants in the ASQ pilot process generally regarded it as a useful program improvement tool and process. However, the experience varied widely among the 30 participating programs, depending on the strength of the program at the start, staff stability, program size (which in turn influenced how thickly or thinly it was staffed), funding stability, organizational culture, and, especially, timing in relation to other things going on inside or surrounding a program. Some of the strong programs selected were ready for the pilot, others were not. (A few among the latter group were in transition to a new director; a few needed more time to build the requisite support from their sponsoring agency.) Many programs in the pilot were neither strong nor stable. The cities also were at different levels of readiness for the pilot. Some programs had strong ASQ advisors, who spent many hours working with them over the course of the pilot; others advisors were not up to the task.

Participants also reported being surprised and, in some cases, frustrated at the amount of work involved in the ASQ. When there was turnover in school-age

care program directors who also were leading the ASQ team, the assessment process often froze in its track.

Benefits of the Experience

Not every program benefited equally from participation in the ASQ process; but most benefited to some degree. The ASQ process encouraged programs to set goals, plan and prioritize. It created mechanisms for and sources of feedback—team observations, staff, parent and child questionnaires—that led programs to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. The presence of the pilot also had indirect effects, raising consciousness in the host agency around quality issues.

In some cases, directors had already reflected on their program, but the ASQ encouraged staff to ask themselves about their role and responsibility in ensuring a good program. Participation in the process also led some parents to become more interested in the general issue of quality in school-age care. The standards implied by the items on the ASQ rating scale, particularly in the human relations and activities sections, were eye-openers for some staff, the first concrete information they had received on appropriate expectations for their role and behavior. Specific items sometimes led to debate among staff about what was and was not appropriate in their work with children: for instance, how best to manage children who were very active or disruptive, or how to manage conflict among children.

Many programs made moderate improvements, such as reorganizing the classroom, developing activity or interest areas, creating space to do homework, making materials more accessible to children, or—as the above example illustrates—raised staff consciousness about managing children. Some improvements were tied to the modest grants that accompanied ASQ participation. Grants were used to purchase literacy, reading or science materials or a particular curriculum, or to purchase resources listed in the ASQ guide itself. In some cases, new materials led to more activity choices for children. Programs also reported that the process leading up to the grant request led to some staff problem solving about how best to meet needs.

> Through the quality assessment pilot, programs were encouraged to set goals, plan and prioritize. It also created mechanisms for programs to get feedback and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses.

The data gathering demands of the process pointed out things going well and problems needing attention. The staff questionnaire, focused partly on familiarity with program policies and procedures (for instance, for locating children who don't show up and supervising high risk activities), has the potential to be useful to future program planning, staff training and supervision.

Program leaders and staff perceived feedback from children and parents to be a very helpful element of the ASQ process, especially since most programs have no regular mechanism for such feedback. Some parents offered recommendations for changes in practice, while others occasionally affirmed the work staff were doing. Parents could see things that staff might miss, such as the chaos at pick-up times. Parents also provided feedback from their children, who would be much more likely to share things they did not like about a program with their parents than with staff.

Participation in the ASQ pilot gave a few programs leverage within the host agency or site to argue for more resources, such as space, and facilities improvements.

Lessons Learned About the ASQ and Program Improvement

The ASQ experience again taught the old lesson that stronger, healthier and more stable programs are better able to use and benefit from improvement supports such as the ASQ or general technical assistance. It is also true that programs cannot absorb or benefit from technical assistance, and even from grants for specific purposes, until they are at a certain minimal level of functioning. Still, they need resources and supports to get to that level.

The ASQ experience also demonstrated that nudging or pushing programs toward greater self-reflection and self-awareness (just as with pushing individuals) has risks as well as benefits. One risk concerns the energy it diverts from other purposes, particularly when there is little energy to spare. Another is the psychological cost of recognizing improvements that need to be made but cannot due to lack of resources. To some extent, the size of the agency or organization of participating programs influenced the supports they had access to, and the constraints they faced in struggling with program improvement. Even programs in larger agencies, however, often were unable to secure needed supports.

Another key lesson is that program improvement processes cannot be rushed. It takes time to form the right team, prepare senior staff of the host agency for the process, especially in large agencies, and for a technical assistance provider to develop a trusting relationship with a program and its staff. The person providing technical assistance has to be at the program site enough to be available during certain unpredictable but important moments, especially those that offer opportunities for growth. If a program has had little or no parent involvement, it takes time to

establish that as well. Finally, action plans can take a long time to implement fully.

Just as recognizing program improvement takes time, it is important to remember that progress is not always linear; setbacks will occur. Changes achieved are fragile and easily reversible. One reason, noted earlier, is what can be called the gravity of programs: the inclination to revert to the level at which it was operating before. Another is the flux caused by changing staff.

Program improvement is not a linear process—setbacks will occur. Changes achieved are fragile and easily reversible, such as when there is turnover in staff.

The ASQ pilot experience suggested a number of revisions to the model and process, some of which have been incorporated into a revised version. Central among these is a more elaborate readiness assessment, looking at program supports, resources for carrying out program improvement, stability of staff and other selected operational dimensions. The revised ASQ will place moderately greater emphasis on continuous program improvement and, by implication, less on accreditation. Questions have been raised periodically by MOST staff or participants in each city about the appropriateness of the ASQ to different settings, cultural groups and populations. It remains unclear how much diversity the ASQ can handle.

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Part VI

MOST as a System-Building Initiative

MOST is the first foundation-sponsored initiative in the country to focus on strengthening school-age care as a system. For Chapin Hall to evaluate this part of the initiative, we had to develop a framework for considering school-age care as a system, at the metropolitan level. As such, we identified the following constituent elements: (1) providers and provider organizations, including those that may provide space for school-age care (e.g., a school or church) but do not run programs or activities themselves; (2) intermediary organizations—those that provide information and referral for families; general training and technical assistance to providers; training, technical assistance and resources in specific curricular areas (e.g., art, science); and professional education/professional development; and (3) funding, licensing and regulatory agencies.[1] Those constituent elements are influenced directly by policies, standards, regulations, funding amounts and funding procedures; families' ability and willingness to pay for services and their preferences with regard to the content and location of services; and less directly (but still strongly), by knowledge, theory and current societal preoccupations.

In this interim report, we use the three-part framework to characterize the school-age care system in each of the three cities. We then examine the MOST strategies in each city to strengthen the school-age care system.

The School-Age Care System in Each of the Three Cities

All three cities have a patchwork of large and small providers. Some types of providers—for instance, such national youth-serving organizations as Boys and Girls Clubs and Ys, community-based early childhood program providers, and small church-based programs and programs run by ethnic associations—are found in all three cities. Some are found in two of the three cities, such as settlements and other older multi-service agencies in Boston and Chicago; some are unique to each city, such as the Boston Community Centers,

School-age providers in the three MOST cities include local affiliates of large national youth-serving organizations, such as Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs, as well as small church-based programs and those run by ethnic associations.

[1] A few organizations fit more than one category. For example, a large provider may provide training and curricular resources to its own front-line staff. A resource and referral agency may conduct training and have a contract to distribute child care subsidies.

the Chicago Youth Centers and Seattle's Community Day School Association. The park district plays a major provider role in Chicago, a moderate role in Seattle and none in Boston. The school system plays a growing, but to-date narrow, role (i.e., focused on academic remediation) in Chicago; and, in Boston and Seattle, it primarily provides space for school-age care programs operated by other agencies (including, in Seattle, the Parks and Recreation Department). Libraries play a growing role in Chicago and perhaps Seattle, but not in Boston. Chicago's public housing authority runs two school-age programs (and leases space to other agencies). A few federally funded programs are located in Seattle public housing communities.

The nature of intermediary organizations also varies by city. In all three, child care resource and referral agencies play some role (in provider training, as well as information provision, public education and referral for families), but that role varies from major to minor. Of the three MOST sites, only Seattle has a citywide training and technical assistance agency, School's Out Consortium/YWCA. Chicago's Department of Human Services and Seattle's Department of Housing and Human Services both play a role in provider training as well.[10] Also in Boston, Kids of All Learning Abilities (KOALA) provides training and support to individual providers to help them accommodate children with special needs. Arts in Progress in Boston and Loyola University Chicago's Science Linkages in the Community are examples of curriculum/activity resource agencies working in a specific program area. In all three cities, there are some associate-degree-level school-age courses, course sequences, and/or certificate programs sponsored by community colleges (e.g., Harold Washington in Chicago, Seattle Central) and in Boston by the Achieving Program Excellence program of the Child Care Careers Institute. Parents United for Child Care is an important intermediary organization in Boston, providing a voice for parents as well as collecting information for advocacy purposes, sponsoring training and so forth.

School-age care falls within the licensing and regulatory purview of state child care agencies. Licensing responsibilities fall to the Office of Child Care Services in Boston, the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services in Chicago, and in Seattle, the Office of Child Care Policy in the Washington Department of Social and Health Services has similar responsibilities. The child care subsidy system is managed by the Office of Child Care Services in Boston, the Department of Human Services in Chicago, and the Department of Housing and Human Services in Seattle. Park districts tend to have their own standards and procedures, as do schools that run their own after-school programs (as in Chicago). Historically, the United Way has been an important private funder in Boston and Chicago; the park district is becoming a major funder (as well as provider) in Chicago; and the Families and Education Levy is an important and unique

[10] Seattle's Department of Housing and Human Services contracts with the School's Out Consortium and Seattle Central Community College to provide on-site technical assistance to each of the 140-150 licensed programs that are part of the Child Care Subsidy Program.

source of funds in Seattle. Boston and Chicago both have special funds for child care facilities improvement (the Child Care Capital Investment Fund and the Illinois Facilities Fund).

In the interim report we also make a preliminary effort to describe how school-age care in each city functions as a system. Obviously, there is no centralized governance mechanism or institution for school-age care in any of the cities. Leadership is diffuse, informal, based largely on length of involvement in the field, and, to some extent self-selected. The functioning of the system is shaped by a variety of working relationships—some contractual, others less formal—between providers and funders and between providers and intermediary institutions; but also among intermediaries, and to a lesser extent among providers. (Many of these relationships existed prior to MOST; some are the result of MOST efforts.) For example, representatives of organizations that do training and professional development in each city communicate and do some joint planning. Some of the state and federal child care funding that flows to each city is set aside for training, creating relationships between city funding agencies and training organizations. In Seattle, a collaborative spirit allows the Parks and Recreation department of the city to run after-school programs in the city's middle schools.

The other side of the story in each city is lack of communication and what might be called inadvertent competition. For instance, in some Chicago neighborhoods, park district and school-based programs located near each other inadvertently compete for the same children. Until recently, there was almost no coordination between these two programs, which are perhaps the largest after-school providers in Chicago. Organizations that do training sometimes plan and act on their own, at least partly due to lack of time and energy to coordinate.

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working relationships—some
contractual, others less formal

System-Building as an Activity

Given the variety of organizations involved in providing, supporting and overseeing school-age programs, one can argue that there is no system of school-age care. As noted, no one institution governs it. Individual programs and their staff may or may not identify

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with the abstraction of a school-age care system; their main referents may more likely be their agencies (or agency systems, e.g., Ys, Boys and Girls Clubs) and their philosophy, their community, and their funding sources. For the majority of those who staff school-age care programs, being a school-age care provider is an ephemeral identity. More broadly, as a field of service, school-age care has no clear boundaries and no one professional base or identity. School-age care is a system made up of, or at the intersection of, other, overlapping systems.

The organizational heterogeneity, diffuse identity and varied perspective on purpose might be seen to complicate the system-building task in school-age care. How, then, does one work to strengthen school-age care as a system? One dimension of system building might be better characterized as field building, working across states and cities, across existing professions and service-provision organizations, to build a sense of a new common enterprise, a new profession with its own standards. That certainly has been a principal focus of Wellesley's National Institute on Out-of-School Time and the National School-Age Care Alliance. As a result of the efforts of these two organizations, there is indeed a nascent and growing sense among those involved in school-age care around the country that they are involved in a common enterprise. There is a small, albeit growing, core of people who identify themselves as school-age care professionals. (Colleges and universities nonetheless remain mostly on the sideline.) There is growing awareness of and interest in the NSACA quality standards. To some extent, also, school-age care is building itself, as those who come to it from related fields recognize that it is different than what they did in the past.

MOST reflects a complementary strategy. A service system (as opposed to a field of service) is found in a place—a state or city or neighborhood. MOST's system-building efforts have focused primarily on the city and, to a lesser extent, the neighborhood levels. The strategy has been to identify the various agencies, organizations and component elements that are part of a school-age care system, broadly defined, and try both to strengthen each in place (to help them do their daily work as it is currently defined), and to create new structures and mechanisms for city-wide systemic activities.[11] Systemic activities include planning, priority-setting and coordination; communication and feedback; forging new links among individuals and organizations—school-age workers to professional development opportunities, new workers to experienced ones (in Seattle's mentorship program), programs to potential curricular or programming resources, and those engaged separately in a particular activity (e.g., training, professional development) to each other; and new communication and feedback.

[11] The efforts of MOST in each city to strengthen things in place—to support promote professional development activities, the quality of school-age programs, information resources for families, culturally-sensitive programs, etc.—will be discussed at length in the final evaluation report.

Ideally, these activities engage stakeholders in a way that leads them to view themselves as part of something larger, and to consider their activities more explicitly in system-building terms.

Some of the planning, coordination, or linkage efforts are deliberate, and some opportunistic—when a new federal grants program comes along, or when the school or park district decides to start a new initiative or change direction. In all three cities, MOST has encouraged or required its own grantees to participate in common activities. One example of opportunistic effort at forging links can be found in Boston, where Parents United for Child Care has been instrumental in linking isolated school-age programs in different low-income neighborhoods to emerging initiatives such as Science in Our Communities and READ Boston.

In many cases, MOST has used its own activities—working groups, committees, workshops and forums—as a context to bring different school-age care providers and/or intermediary organizations together, in part with the idea that relationships developed in these settings would carry over outside of MOST. (In other words, participating in MOST itself has served as one avenue of system-building.) Each city has a core advisory/policy group made up of key stakeholders and leaders in the local school-age care community. These groups have become a forum for city-wide agenda setting and discussion. Each city also has a distinct working group or committee structure. (Committees tend to be organized around particular MOST objectives, such as supply, strengthening programs and professional development.)

Part VII

Reflections on the Overall MOST Strategy

In each city, MOST has a distinct personality and has fit itself into the larger political, social and institutional context in a different way, with perhaps differing degrees of success. As one of the Chicago MOST leaders noted, MOST is a practical initiative. At the same time, it has contributed to a broadening of perspective on school-age care among stakeholders in each city. In all three cities, MOST lead agencies and collaborators are doing good, well-focused work. MOST funds have been used carefully and well by the lead agencies and, with only a few exceptions, by their major contractors and grantees. The cities have done a good to excellent job leveraging other resources with DWRD monies. They have brought key stakeholders together to plan. They have linked scores of programs to outside resources and enabled resource organizations to extend their reach.

MOST staff and collaborators have been responsive and attentive to the mission of strengthening school-age care in underserved neighborhoods and among underserved populations. MOST, in the training and workshops it has sponsored and in specially targeted funding, has raised consciousness about the service needs of specific populations, including middle school children, children from refugee and immigrant families, and special needs children.

MOST funds have been well used both by programs starved for resources and by those already strong but with an agenda of things to strengthen. Relatively modest resources, say a $500 grant, can make a surprisingly big difference to the average school-age care program in a low-income community. At the same time, MOST staff note also a trade-off between grants that primarily meet short-term needs and those that contribute in some way to long-term capacity building.

MOST staff and committee collaborators have come to appreciate that bringing resources into programs requires a distinct set of skills. The lead agencies have all grown steadily in their ability to manage grants. They recognize the importance of monitoring grants and are clear about the importance of asking for a *quid pro quo*, for instance, a resource/self-sufficiency plan for those receiving grants to create slots, or having program improvement grantees meet monthly. In addition, the lead agencies have become more aware of the importance of technical assistance accompanying certain kinds of grants, especially new program start-up grants and facilities grants.

MOST is helping to clarify the attributes of a strong school-age care system. These include organizations and agencies with complementary strengths working together to link resources, and having city-wide training and technical assistance mechanisms in place, perhaps based in one or more organizations like Seattle's School's Out Consortium. MOST efforts

have also revealed obstacles to system-building in school-age care. For instance, it is difficult to do common planning and priority setting with fragmented, uncoordinated funding streams and when some of the largest providers have little interest in participating. It has not always been easy to find ways to collaborate with other relevant initiatives.

MOST's reliance on voluntary committees and working groups for oversight, planning and priority-setting has been a mixed experience. The MOST committees and working groups have been terrific forums for making connections and for stepping back to look at the school-age care system as a whole. At the same time, they have not all been equally effective. A handful of participants in each city have commented upon the complexity and time-consuming quality of MOST's collaborative strategies, whether the strategy of consensus building in Seattle, or the amount of work that goes into reviewing scores of proposals for tiny grants in Chicago. A handful of intermediary organizations that felt themselves competent at what they did found themselves being held accountable to others whom they felt were not competent to judge their work. The large provider organizations (but not necessarily their individual staff) often have been hard to engage, since they are primarily inwardly focused.

A large question hanging over the MOST initiative is whether its voluntary, collaborative structure is intended to serve as the germ for a more permanent governance structure for school-age care. If so, where should this structure be housed long-term?

A large question hanging over MOST in each city is whether it—the staff structure, committees and committee functions—is intended to serve as the germ for a more permanent governance structure for school-age care? If so, then a decision has to be made about where to house this governance structure long term. The collaborative structures created through MOST depend mostly on volunteer time and energy from already tremendously busy people. There also is a challenge when these structures—committees, working groups—are given responsibility to oversee contracts and grants. If these are governance entities, by whose authority are they so?

It is our assessment that, while many of the key stakeholders in the school-age care system in each city have been happy to participate in MOST and have appreciated MOST efforts, few would grant the authority to govern and control public funds to the MOST working groups and committees, except perhaps in Seattle. Nor is that a realistic expectation. Indeed, in Boston and Chicago, there are prominent examples of large providers (e.g., the Chicago Park

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District) or intermediary organizations (Bostons Arts in Progress) developing their own plans and initiatives independently (though in Chicago, MOST helped stimulate the park district's activity).

The issue of governance aside, our principal concerns are that MOST already has too many objectives and, as a consequence, MOST resources have been spread too thinly; and that, while in smaller cities it probably makes sense to focus MOST on a city-wide effort, in larger ones MOST should perhaps be more neighborhood focused. The cities probably promised, or felt compelled to promise, too much at the outset. One participant described it as "a very broad-based sowing of seeds." They have since done a good job scaling back and prioritizing. But there remains a sense that some of that prioritizing is done simply to make the work manageable.

It is our feeling at this point that supply-building is primarily a public will/public policy problem, best left to advocacy organizations. That is not to minimize the value of each slot and new program created with DWRD and matching resources. Rather, it is to argue that the relatively limited resources of a second phase of MOST would be best focused on some well-defined strategy to strengthen program quality and, selectively, on system-building. The supply shortfall problem is a gigantic one, requiring new annual funding of millions of dollars to address (especially in larger cities). For instance, at a figure of $2,500 per-child, a shortfall of 10,000 slots in one good-sized city would require an ***annual*** increased expenditure of $25 million. Given the relatively limited size of MOST resources, it makes more sense to concentrate those resources in other areas.

In conclusion, this interim assessment suggests that MOST has contributed in a variety of significant and small ways to the school-age care system in each participating city; in particular, to the quantity and quality of care for low-income children and to collaboration among providers. MOST has strengthened existing relationships between agencies and organizations involved in school-age care, and has created new structures and processes for city-wide systemic activities. There has been much progress toward goals and much learning along the way, creating a solid foundation for the remainder of the initiative. Chapin Hall's final evaluation report—which, as mentioned earlier, will be completed during the summer of 1999—will describe the implementation and outcomes of the initiative in more detail and place these findings in the larger context of school-age care as an evolving field.

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